Ottawa urged to do more to help other countries

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Body

Foreign-aid and climate advocates say Ottawa needs to do much more to help developing countries brace for climate chaos without going broke, after Canada's uninspiring contribution to a summit last month that aimed at reforming global finance.

French President Emmanuel Macron hosted the summit in Paris, convening leaders from Africa and small island states, along with rich countries and financial institutions. The New Global Financing Pact was intended to start transforming the systems developing countries use to take on debt, seek bailouts and pay off loans, such as through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The meeting came as countries across the developing world face devastating natural disasters, pandemics and inflation that have made them unable to pay back loans, with little funding left to fulfil their pledges to protect biodiversity. Caroline Brouillette, the head of Climate Action Network Canada, said the multilateral development banks aren't working in the face of "converging climate and debt crises."

"Lending more money just further fuels that cycle of debt," Brouillette said.

The federal Liberal government says it supports the reform of international financial institutions and Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly highlighted the issue to the United Nations General Assembly last September.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also co-chairs a United Nations group advocating for the Sustainable Development Goals along with Barbadoes Prime Minister Mia Mottley. The pair have been pushing for international financing reform to help Caribbean states facing rising sea levels and increasingly severe storms.

But advocates say Ottawa has not shown how it plans to push for financing system reforms and they noticed Canada's comparatively low-profile presence at Macron's summit last month.

Attendees included Macron and Mottley, who co-hosted the event, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

Canada sent International Development Minister Harjit Sajjan to Paris, instead of Trudeau, Joly or Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland.

"The political signal of sending a head of state says something about the level of importance that is accorded to an issue," Brouillette said.

She said she was also puzzled that Canada wasn't a signatory to a joint letter calling for global financing reform, published in the Guardian newspaper ahead of the summit.

The letter was signed by U.S. President Joe Biden, as well as the leaders of South Africa, Brazil, Senegal and all G7 countries except Italy and Canada. The signatories are part of the steering committee that worked together to launch the summit, which Canada was not involved in either.

The letter said developing countries should be able to see economic growth while lowering carbon emissions, instead of being left to face the brunt of climate change.

Canada did publish a similar op-ed in the same newspaper with New Zealand and Australia, but it was signed by Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault, not Trudeau.

The summit ended with a drafted statement and relatively small pockets of financing from various countries. From Canada, there was $50 million for a program aimed at attracting financing projects helping women and minorities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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